



[Pierre Poujade, 1920-2003](#)

The Petty Bourgeoisie and Poujadism

This section on class alliance has looked at peasants and traditional leaders, as well as at bourgeois and proletarians. We now consider the petty-bourgeoisie, which is a large class in South Africa, and one that includes a high proportion of the very poor. The hawkers and the “survivors” are members of this class, as much as the small shopkeepers and small business people (the so-called “SMMEs”).

The petty bourgeoisie are the urban equivalent of the peasant class. They share with the peasantry the peculiar characteristic of being what Karl Marx called (in the “[18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte](#)”) a “sack of potatoes”. Such a class has minimal internal linkages. It exists as an aggregate, and not as an organism. In chemical terms, it is a mixture, and not a compound.

This is in contrast with the working proletariat, which is a socialised, or in other words, interdependent class. For this among other reasons, the working class is a more advanced class, capable of giving leadership to the peasantry and to the petty-bourgeoisie.

In his [address at Joe Slovo's graveside](#) on the 15th anniversary of Slovo's death, 6 January 2010, the current General Secretary of the SACP Cde Dr Blade Nzimande said, concerning the leadership the working-class party must give:

“We must also recruit amongst small businesses, who continue to be suffocated by monopoly capital in general, the capitalist malls built in the townships that are killing their small businesses, and the ‘tenderpreneurs’ who continue to enrich themselves often through corrupt tenders at the expense of honest small entrepreneurs who do not have political connections in the state. We must strengthen small entrepreneurs and defeat ‘tenderpreneurs’! We need to support skills development for co-operatives, small and micro enterprises. We need to deepen our struggle for the transformation of our financial sector to benefit the workers and the poor, including co-operatives and small and micro businesses.

“As we have done over the past 16 years and before, we need to engage and seek to influence the terms and conditions under which a new black section of the bourgeoisie emerges and grow. We need to fight for truly broad based empowerment and seek to direct investment

into the productive sectors of our economy that is creating jobs. We need to continuously expose and challenge self-enrichment of a few and fight the emergence of a highly dependent compradorial bourgeoisie! In this struggle we must also seek to expose opportunistic use of the language and demands of the working class in order to hide the accumulation agenda of a compradorial bourgeoisie. This is the meaning of Slovo's life, struggles and observations today!"

The above-quoted speech was all the more valuable for the fact that the Marxist literature devoted to the petty bourgeoisie in our time is pitifully small, worldwide. We now go to a recollection of France in the 1950s (but written later) for an account of the phenomenon of "Poujadism" (**attached**). This was a petty-bourgeois uprising that allied itself, in its beginning and at local level, with the communists, until it degenerated towards near-fascism. See above for a picture of [Pierre Poujade](#) (1920-2003), the leader of this movement.

In their relations with the intermediate classes, or fractions of classes, history shows that the communists must proceed with great care, and must not lose focus. But it also shows that these classes are real, and can potentially have a self-conscious and beneficial development, especially if aided by the always-better-organised working class. But if petty-bourgeois populism gets out of hand, which it can do, then the distance between it and fascism can be covered in a short time.

Foster's account is written from a somewhat sectarian point of view. It disparages the efforts of the French communist party, but it does not say that the vanguard party should not give leadership to the petty bourgeoisie. On the contrary, Foster confirms this necessity. All he can manage to say against the communists is that if the Trotskyists had been in charge they would have done better. This is a hollow claim.

More on the nature and the problems of the petty bourgeoisie can be found in Engels' (e.g. "[The Housing Question](#)"), Rosa Luxemburg's (e.g. "[Reform or Revolution?](#)"), and Lenin's (e.g. "[The Tax in Kind](#)") writings.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The case-history of Poujadisme, Foster](#).
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